

## *Patchwork*

“It does make me feel ashamed, I declare,” said Mrs. Halford; “the idea of Zebulon’s grandma asking Mrs. Lemuel Lawson for a piece of her new cambric for patchwork. You should have seen Mrs. Lawson’s eyes as she answered:

“‘Oh, certainly, madam,’ and offered her the scissors to cut it off herself; and Zebulon’s grandma said: ‘Thanky; I’ll take jest the least tenty piece, lest you mightn’t have a good *patron*.’ Yes, she said ‘patron.’ Oh, Amelia, it did make me so angry.”

“I don’t think it was anything so very dreadful, Frances,” said the more placid Amelia. “I’m sure your Zebulon’s grandma is a very nice old lady; and who is Mrs. Lawson, I’d like to know?—a flaunting thing, with rouge on her cheeks, not half so respectable as good, clean Grannie Hardbake.”

“Oh, Amelia,” said Mrs. Halford, “can’t you see the difference between people yet? Mrs. Lawson is at the very top of the ladder, has been in the highest society abroad, has photographs of princesses and duchesses that were her bosom friends, and puts up at the St. Bridget Hotel when she’s in New York. You know Cousin Kate is there, and I took grandma to see *her*, and Mrs. Lawson, who had been shopping, came in to show us her purchases. She’s ever so sociable with Kate; often lunches with her there. Why do you say ‘no doubt,’ and laugh? You’d like everybody to be chimney-sweeps, no doubt. You’ve the spirit of Jack Cade.”

“Gracious! Frances,” cried Amelia; “how you go on! I’m sure *I* like wealth and style and good birth as well as you do; but though she may wear velvet and diamonds, and board at the St. Bridget, Mrs. Lawson is a vulgar woman; and if she despises Zeb’s grannie—”

“*Zeb’s grannie!*” echoed Mrs. Halford. “Wouldn’t anyone think we lived in a shanty on Ragpickers’ Hill? She did not show what she felt. Indeed, when I apologized, she said: ‘Oh! old people grow eccentric. The Dowager Countess Dunladdy, whom I knew in Dublin, always asked for pearls whenever she saw them, after she was ninety; and it mortified her daughter very much, for people always gave them to her.’”

Here Amelia shrieked with laughter, and her sister flounced out of one door as grannie came in at the other.

“Well, Grannie,” said Amelia, “it seems you’ve been to see the wonderful Mrs. Lemuel Lawson. How do you like her?”

“Well,” said grannie, meditatively, “I dunno. She takes airs enough, and she looks partly like Maggie Blackclock that was bound out to Miss Trimmer down to our place and runned away with the spoons and fifteen dollars;” at which Amelia shrieked again.

Grannie Hardbake went home next day, after leaning out of the carriage to promise her granddaughter-in-law the last quilt when finished.

Grannie being gone, Mrs. Halford was left to cultivate her new acquaintance as much as she pleased; and very soon this bosom friend and companion of the European aristocracy was also hers. They rode together in Mrs. Halford's carriage. They lunched at Mrs. Halford's expense. Before she married Zebulon Hardbake Halford, Mrs. Halford had been only a hard-working little dressmaker, and she felt that she was greatly honored. She modeled her dress and manners after Mrs. Lawson's; and longed for the day when Zebulon should take her to Europe, and under the wing of Mrs. Lemuel Lawson she also should come to know princesses and duchesses, and at least courtesy low in the presence of an emperor.

Honest Zebulon did not like the intimacy much; Amelia was positively angry; but neither of them said much. Zebulon wanted Fanny to be happy, and Amelia knew there would be an end to the affair in time.

But the summer passed, and fall faded, and still there was no change. Winter came, and Mrs. Halford's friend was still a friend. Grandma Hardbake, yes, and Grandpa Hardbake, too, arrived to spend Christmas week, and grandma brought the quilt of octagon pattern which she had promised, and Cousin Kate was at the St. Bridget again—Cousin Kate, who some years before had married a rich old man, and on gala days fairly glittered with diamonds. Still Mrs. Lemuel Lawson was Mrs. Halford's guiding star.

It was New Year's eve, and everyone was busy preparing for callers, Mrs. Halford amongst the rest. She stood in the midst of baskets and parcels, with a white apron on, when the bell rang.

"If it should be Cecilia," cried she. It had come to Christian names now—Mrs. Lawson was Cecilia. "But it's too late. Who can it be?" And then there was a rush and rustle in the hall, and a big man with white whiskers, and a little woman with yellow crimps stood amongst them.

"Why, cousin Kate!" cried Frances, and then everyone asked:

"What's the matter?" for it was evident that something unpleasant had happened.

"We've been robbed," said Kate. "All my diamonds—every one of them."

"And five hundred in cash," cried her husband.

"And my sealskin set—sacque, muff and tippet, and lots of other things. It happened at noon. The thief entered our room while we were at lunch. We were a little late. We'd been bidding Mrs. Lemuel Lawson good-bye."

"Good-bye! Where was she going?" asked Frances.

"Oh! she had a telegram from some wonderful body or other, or said she had," said Kate. "I don't know whether a countess wanted her to go to her daughter's wedding, or a princess to her uncle's funeral. It was something fine, of course. She's going to Europe."

“Why, she said she’d come to see me lady’s day, and she borrowed my watch and twenty-five dollars, yesterday,” muttered Mrs. Halford; “but of course she’s sent them back.”

“Not by me,” said Cousin Kate; “but, anyhow, while we were at lunch, our room was entered, and we were robbed. We think it was a chambermaid.”

“Why?” asked everyone.

“Why,” said Kate, “my trunk was opened and nearly emptied, and there’s a broken nail in the trunk—one that fastens the tray, you know—and it always catches one’s dress. It had caught the thief’s, for there was a bit of figured stuff sticking to it; we’ve saved it, and said nothing about it. It will help the detective, you know.”

“Lor’, that’s cute; let me see it,” said grannie.

Kate handed it to her.

Grannie looked at it.

“Um,” she said. “Where’ve I seen it—figured violet cashmere. I remember patrons well. I’m such a favorite of makin’ quilts. Massy sakes, Fanny, where’s the octagon woolen quilt I fetched you?”

“I’ll get it,” said Amelia.

She flew away, and came back with the quilt in her arms.

“Spread it out,” said grannie. “That’s right; here it is. There! And she laid the tattered fragment on a triangle of figured violet cashmere that looked as though it were a piece of itself.

“That’s a bit of Mrs. Lemuel Lawson’s gown,” said she; “don’t you remember it, Fanny?”

Fanny gave a shriek.

“It’s exactly as I supposed,” said Amelia; “she is an impostor, and she has robbed you. Your watch is gone, too, Fanny.”

Fanny could not believe it, but when acute detectives had found not only the violet cashmere with a hole in it, but Kate’s diamonds and furs, in Mrs. Lawson’s trunk, she was forced to admit the truth, and even to hear with patience Grannie Hardbake’s account of the affair, which always ends thus:

“And to think Mrs. Lemuel Lawson wasn’t her real name, and she should turn out to be the very Maggie Blackclock that was bound out to Miss Trimmer down to our place, and run off with the silver spoons and fifteen dollars, twenty years ago! But, you see, I don’t remember faces as well as I do patrons, on account of being such a favorite of patchwork.”

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